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THE WILLEY HOUSE.

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THE WILLEY HOUSE

AND

SONNETS

BY

THOMAS WILLIAM PARSONS

CAMBRIDGE
PRESS OF JOHN WILSON AND SON
1875

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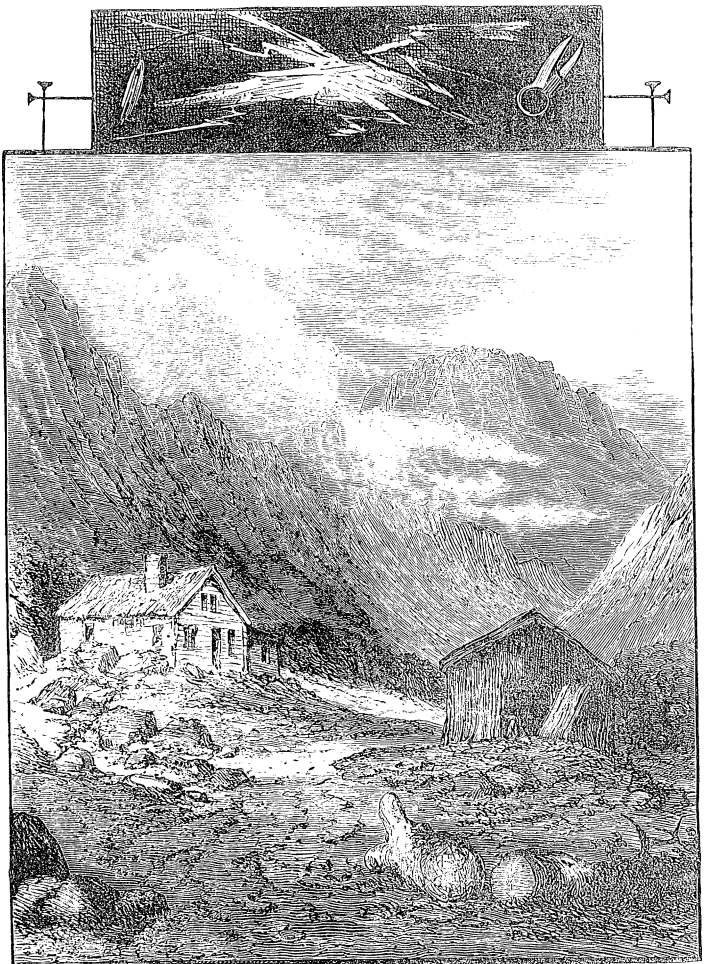

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THE WILLEY HOUSE.

A Ballad of the White Hills.

I.

COME, children, put your baskets down,
And let the blushing berries be;
Sit here and wreathe a laurel crown,
And if I win it, give it me.

'Tis afternoon, — it is July, —
The mountain shadows grow and grow;
Your time of rest, and mine is nigh —
The moon was rising long ago.

While yet on old Chocòrua's top
The lingering sunlight says farewell,
Your purple-fingered labor stop,
And hear a tale I have to tell.

II.

You see that cottage in the glen,
Yon desolate, forsaken shed,
Whose mouldering threshold now and then
The summer traveller comes to tread.

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No smoke is curling from its roof,
  At eve no cattle gather round,
No neighbor now, with dint of hoof,
  Prints his glad visit on the ground.

A happy home it was of yore;
  At morn the flocks went nibbling by,
And Farmer Willey, at his door,
  Oft made their reckoning with his eye.

Where yon rank alder-trees have sprung,
  And birches cluster, thick and tall,
Once the stout apple overhung,
  With his red gifts, the orchard wall.

Right fond and pleasant in their ways
  The gentle Willey people were;
I knew them in those peaceful days,
  And Mary, — every one knew her.

III.

Two summers now had seared the hills,
  Two years of little rain or dew;
High up the courses of the rills
  The wild-rose and the raspberry grew:

The mountain sides were cracked and dry,
  And frequent fissures on the plain,
Like mouths, gaped open to the sky
  As though the parched earth prayed for rain.

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One sultry August afternoon,
Old Willey, looking toward the west,
Said — 'We shall hear the thunder soon:
Oh! if it bring us rain, 'tis blest.'

And even with his word, a smell
Of sprinkled fields passed through the air,
And from a single cloud there fell
A few large drops, — the rain was there.

Ere set of sun a thunder-stroke
Called all the giant floods to rise:
Then the great seal of heaven was broke,
Then burst the gates that barred the skies!

And all these cliffs that stand sublime
Around, like solemn priests appeared,
Gray druids of the olden time,
Each with his white and streaming beard.

Till in one sheet of seething foam
The mingling torrents joined their might;
But in the Willeys' quiet home
Was naught but silence and 'Good-night!'

For soon they went to their repose,
And in their beds, all safe and warm,
Saw not how fast the waters rose,
Heard not the growing of the storm.

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But just before the stroke of ten,
Old Willey looked into the night,
Then called upon his two hired men,
And woke his wife, who struck a light;

Though her hand trembled, as she heard
The horses whinnying in the stall,
And — 'Children!' was the only word,
The mother from her lips let fall.

A sound! as though a mighty gale
Some forest from its hold had riven,
Mixed with a rattling noise like hail,
God! art Thou raining rocks from heaven?

A flash! — a shriek! — the lightning showed
The mountain moving from his seat!
Out! out into the slippery road!
Into the wet with naked feet!

No time for dress, — for life! for life!
No time for any word but this:
The father grasped his boys, — his wife
Snatched her young babe, — not now to kiss.

And Mary with the younger girl,
Barefoot and shivering in their smocks,
Sped forth amid that angry whirl
Of rushing waves and whelming rocks.

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For down the mountain's crumbling side,
Full half the mountain from on high
Came sinking, like the snows that slide
From the great Alps, about July.

And with it went the lordly ash,
And with it went the kingly pine;
Cedar and oak amid the crash,
Dropped down like clippings of the vine.

Two rivers rushed, — the one that broke
His wonted bounds and drowned the land,
And one that streamed with dust and smoke,
A flood of earth, of stones and sand.

Then for a time the vale was dry,
The soil had swallowed up the wave;
Till one star looking from the sky,
A signal to the tempest gave:

The clouds withdrew — the storm was o'er —
Bright Aldebàran burned again;
The buried river rose once more,
And foamed along his gravelly glen.

IV.

At morn the men of Conway felt
Some dreadful thing had chanced that night,
And those by Breton woods who dwelt
Observed the mountain's altered height.

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Old Crawford and the Fabyan lad
Came down from Amonoosuck then,
And passed the Notch, — ah! strange and sad
It was to see the ravaged glen.

But having toiled for miles, in doubt,
With many a risk of limb and neck,
They saw, and hailed with joyful shout
The Willey House amid the wreck.

That avalanche of stones and sand,
Remembering mercy in its wrath,
Had parted, and on either hand,
Pursued the ruin of its path.

And there upon its pleasant slope,
The cottage, like a sunny isle
That wakes the shipwrecked seaman's hope,
Amid that horror seemed to smile.

And still upon the lawn before,
The peaceful sheep were nibbling nigh;
But Farmer Willey at his door
Stood not to count them with his eye.

And in the dwelling, — O despair!
The silent room! the vacant bed!
The children's little shoes were there —
But whither were the children fled?

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That day a woman's head, all gashed,
  Her long hair streaming in the flow,
Went o'er the dam, and then was dashed
  Among the whirlpools down below.

And farther down, by Saco side,
  They found the mangled forms of four,
Held in an eddy of the tide;
  But Mary, she was seen no more.

Yet never to this mournful vale
  Shall any maid, in summer time,
Come without thinking of the tale
  I now have told you, in my rhyme.

And when the Willey House is gone,
  And its last rafter is decayed,
Its history may yet live on
  In this your ballad that I made.

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VIRGIL'S EPIGRAPH ON THE PALACE OF AUGUSTUS.*

ALL night long it raineth, but the shows return with day,
Jove and Cæsar dividing the world and Rome in their sway.

These verses were my making, but another bore the bay.
So for yourselves, ye robins,
Ye do not build your nest;
So for yourselves, ye little bees,
Your honey is not pressed;
So for yourselves, ye oxen,
You never drag the plow;
So for yourselves, ye woolly flocks,
Your own fleece doth not grow.

* From the anecdote by Donatus.
Nocte pluit totâ, redeunt spectacula manè:
Divisum imperium cum Jove Cæsar habet.

Hos ego versiculos feci, tulit alter honores.
Sic vos non vobis nidificatis aves,
Sic vos non vobis mellificatis apes,
Sic vos non vobis vellera fertis oves,
Sic vos non vobis fertis aratra boves.

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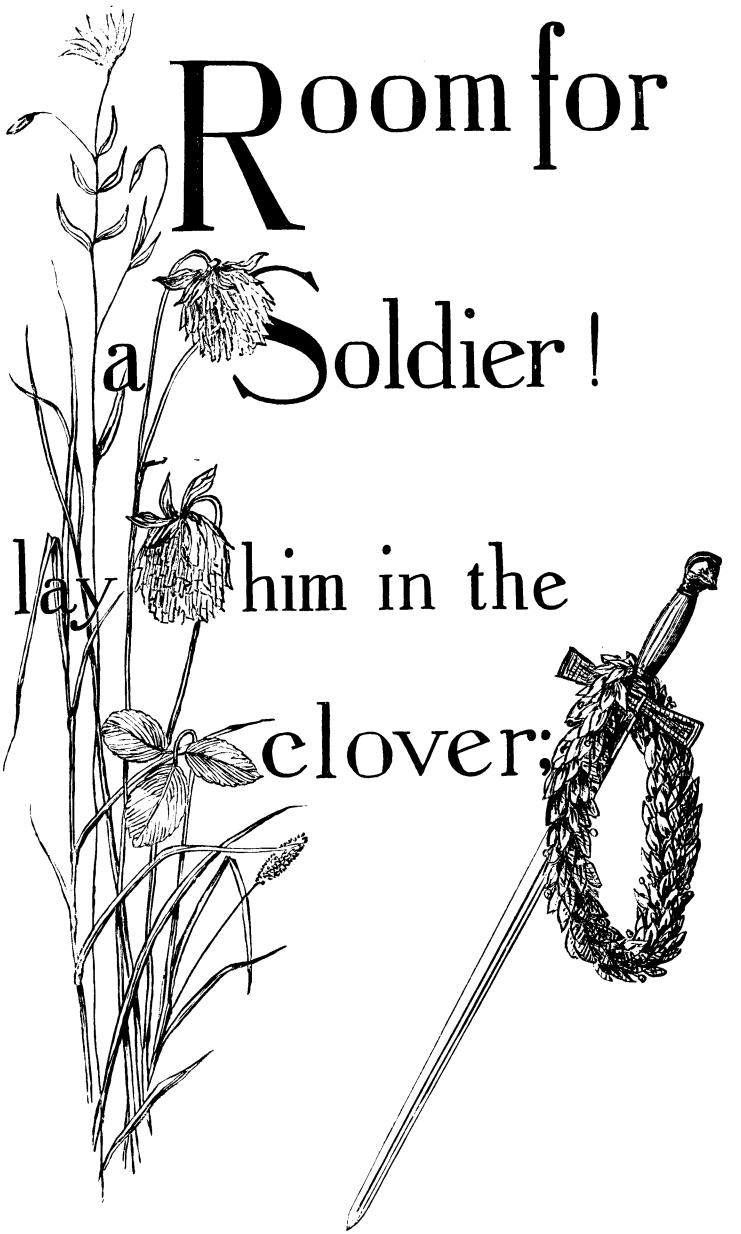

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DIRGE.

FOR ONE WHO FELL IN BATTLE.

ROOM for a Soldier! lay him in the clover;
He loved the fields, and they shall be his cover;
Make his mound with hers who called him once her lover:
Where the rain may rain upon it,
Where the sun may shine upon it,
Where the lamb hath lain upon it,
And the bee will dine upon it.

Bear him to no dismal tomb under city churches;
Take him to the fragrant fields, by the silver birches,
Where the whippoorwill shall mourn, where the oriole perches:
Make his mound with sunshine on it,
Where the bee will dine upon it,
Where the lamb hath lain upon it,
And the rain will rain upon it.

Busy as the busy bee, his rest should be the clover;
Gentle as the lamb was he, and the fern should be his cover;
Fern and rosemary shall grow my soldier's pillow over:

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Where the rain may rain upon it,
Where the sun may shine upon it,
Where the lamb hath lain upon it,
And the bee will dine upon it.

Sunshine in his heart, the rain would come full often
Out of those tender eyes which evermore did soften:
He never could look cold till we saw him in his coffin.
Make his mound with sunshine on it,
Where the wind may sigh upon it,
Where the moon may stream upon it,
And Memory shall dream upon it.

"Captain or Colonel," — whatever invocation
Suit our hymn the best, no matter for thy station, —
On thy grave the rain shall fall from the eyes of a mighty nation!
Long as the sun doth shine upon it
Shall glow the goodly pine upon it,
Long as the stars do gleam upon it
Shall Memory come to dream upon it.

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A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

"Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome then; no planets strike;
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm, —
So gracious and so hallowed is the time."

O BIRD of dawning! all the night
Sing; for the season is at hand
When hearts are glad, and faces bright,
And happiness is Heaven's command:
Shout, chanticleer! that all may hear
Whom cares have chastened through the year:
Christmas is come to cheer the land!

And now no spirit walks — but one
Of Love, — nor shall that spirit cease:
No planet rules — except the Sun
Of Righteousness, the Prince of Peace!
And that whose ray first led the way
To where the babe in Bethlehem lay;
The star that ne'er shall know decrease.

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BEN DELL' INTELLETTO.

WHENEVER *Good of Intellect* comes in,
Then peace is with us, and a soft control
Of all harsh thinking; and but one desire
Fills every bosom, — to forget the din
Of outside things, and render up the soul
To friendship's banquet by an evening fire.
Then is the season in this world of sin
That brings new strength, and keepeth us heart-whole
Amid the changes that distress and tire;
And when from wisdom we have wanderers been,
So that a stupor on the spirit stole
From things unknown, with visions dark and dire,
In this high presence we restore ourselves
More than by all the volumes on our shelves.

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TO B—— P——.

TOGETHER, friend, we trod the stones of Rome
And watched the men renewing those red walls
That hold the history of two thousand years
And are themselves a history and a shrine.
Then marked Soracte from the mountain-dome,
On which no meaner shadow ever falls
Than heaven's own clouds, and moved by Time to tears,
Felt the past fade, the present grow divine,
And inly thought: beyond the ocean foam
A greater Rome is growing that recalls
Cato's republic, watched with many fears!
But planted by such hands as make the line
Of those Romulidæ seem as poor to us
As Washington was more than Romulus.

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TO THE NEW ROYALL PROFESSOR.

LEARN'D in the law who leav'st the busy street
And studious chambers for the gowned chair,
Amid the cordial friends that speak thee fair,
And thine accession to the laurel greet,
If one slow scholar in his hushed retreat
A little longer than the rest forbear,
'Tis but as minstrels that salute some heir
Wait for still night to make their flutes more sweet.

And as in heaven there is more joy o'er one
Repentant worldling than o'er ninety-nine
Good men that love the world or make it loved,
So glad Athena glories in the son
Who turns in manhood to his boyhood's shrine,
And Harvard welcomes him with hand ungloved.

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FROM LONDON TO MILTON HILL.

THE wounded man, fresh from the bitter field
And the rough ambulance, — dear lady mine!
In dreadful hospitals, outstretched in pain, —
When the soft ministry of woman's hand
Wipes from his waxen brow the blood congealed
(That paints the peril where he had to stand)
And pours the comfort of her oil and wine
Until he opens his dead eyes again,
And looks the blessing that he cannot speak, —
Feels as I felt when those delightful words
Brought me back wandering in delirium wild
(My brain all fever and my whole frame weak)
To sense again. Methought I was a child,
Listening in meadows to Spring's welcome birds,
And, for the first time in a month, I smiled.

O my sweet lady, noblest of the fair,
And fairest among noblesse, — write again!
Gifts like thine own must always be to spare;
God, when He giveth, *amply* gives to men:
Could borrowing make *thy* heart's abundance bare?

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FENESTRELLA.

FROM this loved window and my Cardinal's chair
I watch the world's face altering with the hours,
From frost and drifts and ice-bound brooks to flowers,
And catch spring-shadows on a landscape bare.

In youth bleak winter chilled me to despair!
My ravaged woodland walk, my broken bowers,
Brought dreams of death, freezing my folded powers;
Or worse, — a life of penury and care!

But Time has taught me this: if hope's a cloud,
Changing its color till it melt away,
Fear is as fanciful. Our hearts are cowed
By their own conjuring: the riper day
Finds hopes and fears but battlements of snow,
Wind-built, sun-gilt, — which one night's rain lays low!

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AGASSIZ.

WHAT made the greatness of our great man gone?
Facts about fishes? — reading laws that rule
The glacier's march and move the black moraine?
An eye whose gaze with equal reverence glowed
At a small star-fish, or his Alpine throne?
Or that he founded for our land a school? —
Never to see that harvest which he sowed! —
His large companionship with man, shell, stone,
And every type of the most High? The fool
Who thinketh in his heart there is no God
Stands here in silence. 'Mid our tears and pain
This joy was uppermost: beneath His rod
Bowing, we bless Him for each nobler mind
Whose highest vision science fails to blind.

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SONNET BY GIUSTI.

To Giambattista del Vico, the Philosopher.

PHILOSOPHY hath in thy volume, Sage!
Of social order deeply set a seed,
Fruitful hereafter of an ample meed,
When Time and Culture shall have riped the Age.
Man's mind with rapture hails its heritage
Of new-born light, the Eternal thought to read
Of the world's moral growth from stage to stage,
And soars to the Most High with pinions freed.
New strength inspires me now: I spurn the base
Bondage that holds me servile to frail clay:
Calm, towards the Central Source I set my face,
The ocean of the ages to survey,
And in my thought, God's universe embrace,
Self-knowing and sublimed by this new ray.

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SONNET.

FROM THE ITALIAN OF GIOVANNI BATTISTA ZAPPI, UPON THE MOSES OF MICHEL ANGELO IN THE CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO IN VINCOLI, AT ROME.

WHOSE form there, sculptured in such mass of stone,
Sits like a giant, carrying art so far
Beyond all works most beautiful and known?
On those quick lips life's very accents are!
That man is Moses: on the awful front
The double ray,* the glory of his beard,
Reveal as much: 'tis Moses from the Mount
When much of Deity in his face appeared!
So looked he once when he the vasty fount
Of sounding waters with his one word stayed.
Such was his aspect when the sea obeyed
And swallowed Egypt. O ye tribes that bent
Before the calf! had you an image made
Like this to worship, less were to repent.

* This alludes to the indication of superhuman power by the budding horns which Michel Angelo has represented upon the head of Moses, adopting the Jewish symbol of strength so frequent in Scripture.

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SONNET.

By Buonagiunta da Lucca.

This reade is rife, that oftentime
Great climbers fall unsoft:
  In humble dales is footing fast,
The trode is not so tickle,
  And though one fall through heedless haste,
Yet is his miss not mickle.

Spenser.

WHAT man, by chance, is up, on Fortune's wheel,
  Let him not triumph in his being high;
For when her smiling side she doth reveal,
  Then she turns round, and, golden days, good-by!

Never was meadow of so fresh a green,
  Nor ever had such flowers as would not fade;
And Nature's law in every thing is seen,
  That what was highest must be lowest laid.

Therefore, let him who wears to-day the crown
  Be modest in his joy — 'tis mickle pain
From the top-stair of all to tumble down;
  But every mountain cometh to a plain.

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GONE is our Beatris to heaven most high,
That peaceful kingdom where God's angels dwell;
And she will stay there — nevermore shall I
Or you, sweet ladies! look on her again.
But not a victim of disease she fell;
No change of season took her to the sky,
But just her goodness, while she walked with men.
For her humility had such a ray,
It pierced to heaven, until her Father grew
Enamoured of his child, and called away
Her healthful spirit to himself: He knew
This life of ours, this weary coil of care
For soul so gentle was too rude to bear.

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ΥΠΝΟΣ.

NOT now for sleep, O slumber-god! we sue;
Hypnus! not sleep, but give our souls repose!
Of the day's music such a mellowing close
As might have rested Shakespeare from his art,
Or soothed the spirit of the Tuscan strong
Who best read life, its passions and its woes,
And wrought of sorrow earth's divinest song.
Bring us a mood that might have lulled Mozart,
Not stupor, not forgetfulness, not dreams,
But vivid sense of what is best and rarest,
And sweet remembrance of the blessèd few;
In the real presence of this fair world's fairest:
A spell of peace — as 'twere by those dear streams*
Boccaccio wrote of, when romance was new.

* The Arno, Chiana, and Mugnone.

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TO A FRIEND.

IF ever, lady, any word of mine,
Spoken in sorrow, came to thy own heart
With any sense of comfort or of peace,
My sorrow that before was half divine
Becomes a joy! and I would never part
With its remembrance. Why should sorrow cease
That makes one happy? I would rather twine
Roses than cypress round a grief so dear;
And I could set as in an emerald shrine
That sadness in my soul for evermore.
How gladly would I live that evening o'er
Thinking of thee! Not vain, amid the scenes
Of that proud park, my mood was, from the shore
Watching the slow state of those ermined queens.

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BIRTH-DAY POEM.

IF this white benediction of the snow
Fall not from heaven upon our frozen fields,
Thy summer festival would hardly know
What wealth June ripeneth or proud Autumn yields.

If never sorrow should come near thy heart,
Nor any coldness dim the light of love,
Thou could'st not know thy nature's better part,
Or look for hope's best harvest from above.

Unbroken sunshine and perpetual heat
Make deserts only: clouds that bring no rain
Shelter no gardens, and thine eyes, my sweet,
Must know what tears are fond eyes to remain.

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SWALLOWS.

CHIMNEY swallows! homeward hie,
You shall have my lady's eye,
To look and love you, now and then,
When she lays down her book or pen,
Shut wholly from the sound of men.
In her chamber if you build,
With her smile you shall be filled;
Nevermore will you desire
To wander from her happy fire,
But fluttering in your new-found nest,
Say to each other — "Here we rest."

O, had I but your pinions, too!
Full well I know what I would do.
I know where I should dwell to-night,
Where lamp and fire and eyes are bright,
And where the music never fails
Even if the instrument be still.
There is a music that prevails
Beyond the master's highest skill;

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Such harmony as flows from love —
Not passionate — but full of peace;
Past understanding, and above
Music — most felt when that doth cease.

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STEUART'S BURIAL.

THE bier is ready and the mourners wait,
The funeral car stands open at the gate.
Bring down our brother; bear him gently, too;
So, friends, he always bore himself with you.
Down the sad staircase, from the darkened room,
For the first time, he comes in silent gloom:
Who ever left this hospitable door
Without his smile and warm "good-by," before?
Now we for him the parting word must say
To the mute threshold whence we bear his clay.

The slow procession lags upon the road, —
'Tis heavy hearts that make the heavy load;
And all too brightly glares the burning noon
On the dark pageant, — be it ended soon!

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The quail is piping and the locust sings, —
O grief, thy contrast with these joyful things!
What pain to see, amid our task of woe,
The laughing river keep its wonted flow!
His hawthorns there, his proudly waving corn,
And all so flourishing, — and so forlorn!
His new built cottage, too, so fairly planned,
Whose chimney ne'er shall smoke at his command.

Two sounds were heard, that on the spirit fell
With sternest moral, — one the passing bell!
The other told the history of the hour,
Life's fleeting triumph, mortal pride and power.
Two trains there met, — the iron-sinewed horse
And the black hearse, the engine and the corse!
Haste on your track, you fiery-winged steed!
I hate your presence and approve your speed;
Fly! with your eager freight of breathing men,
And leave these mourners to their march again!
Swift as my wish, they broke their slight delay,
And life and death pursued their separate way.

The solemn service in the church was held,
Bringing strange comfort as the anthem swelled,
And back we bore him to his long repose,
Where his great elm its evening shadow throws, —
A sacred spot! There often he hath stood,
Showed us his harvests and pronounced them good;
And we may stand, with eyes no longer dim,
To watch new harvests and remember him.

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Peace to thee, STEUART! — and to us! the All-Wise
Would ne'er have found thee readier for the skies:
In His large love He kindly waits the best,
The fittest mood, to summon every guest;
So, in his prime, our dear companion went,
When the young soul is easy to repent:
No long purgation shall he now require
In black remorse, in penitential fire;
From what few frailties might have stained his morn
Our tears may wash him pure as he was born.

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EPITAPH UPON MY FRIEND, DAVID STEUART ROBERTSON.

FROM HIS GRAVE-STONE AT LANCASTER.

HERE STEUART sleeps; and should some brother Scot
Wander this way, and pause upon the spot,
He need not ask, now life's poor show is o'er,
What arms he carried, or what plaid he wore:
So small the value of illustrious birth,
Brought to this solemn, last assay of earth!
Yet, unreproved, his epitaph might say
A royal soul was wrapt in STEUART'S clay;
And generous actions consecrate his mound,
More than all titles, though of kingly sound.

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MAY-DAY.

OH, sing! the swallows are in tune,
Forget the rain of yesterday;
A few more suns will bring us June,
And this, 'tis Chaucer's month,—'tis May.
And the robins are come to the green wood,
And the cowslips will come to the brook;
And the young and the fair and the lovely
Should all have their holiday look.

May sounds of promise. 'Tis a word
All hope!—like Heaven's resplendent bow,
Bringing full leave to tree and bird,
And brook to bloom, to sing, to flow.
'Tis May! and you *may* be as merry—
And, oh! be as good—as you can.
White blossom will bring the red cherry;
And the dutiful child, the good man.

Sing then, be happy!—but be wise:
Remember Him who gave you all;
Remember Him whose watchful eyes
Bend o'er you hourly,—lest you fall.

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And rejoice in the beautiful season
Of sunshine and gladness and youth;
And may God keep your faith and your reason,
As *you* keep your hearts and your truth.

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TO A YOUNG GIRL DYING:

With a Gift of Fresh Palm-Leaves.

THIS is Palm-Sunday: mindful of the day,
I bring palm-branches, found upon my way:
But these will wither; thine shall never die, —
The sacred palms thou bearest to the sky!
Dear little saint, though but a child in years,
Older in wisdom than my gray compeers!
We doubt and tremble, — *we*, with 'bated breath,
Talk of this mystery of life and death:
Thou, strong in faith, art gifted to conceive
Beyond thy years, and teach us to believe!

Then take my palms, triumphal, to thy home,
Gentle white palmer, never more to roam!
Only, sweet sister, give me, ere thou go'st,
Thy benediction, — for my love thou know'st!
We, too, are pilgrims, travelling towards the shrine:
Pray that our pilgrimage may end like thine!

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ON A BUST OF DANTE.

SEE, from this counterfeit of him
Whom Arno shall remember long,
How stern of lineament, how grim,
The father was of Tuscan song:
There but the burning sense of wrong,
Perpetual care and scorn, abide;
Small friendship for the lordly throng;
Distrust of all the world beside.

Faithful if this wan image be,
No dream his life was, — but a fight;
Could any Beatrice see
A lover in that anchorite?
To that cold Ghibeline's gloomy sight
Who could have guessed the visions came
Of Beauty, veiled with heavenly light,
In circles of eternal flame?

The lips as Cumæ's cavern close,
The cheeks with fast and sorrow thin,
The rigid front, almost morose,
But for the patient hope within,

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Declare a life whose course hath been
Unsullied still, though still severe,
Which, through the wavering days of sin,
Kept itself icy-chaste and clear.

Not wholly such his haggard look
When wandering once, forlorn, he strayed,
With no companion save his book,
To Corvo's hushed monastic shade;
Where, as the Benedictine laid
His palm upon the pilgrim guest,
The single boon for which he prayed
The convent's charity was rest.*

Peace dwells not here, — this rugged face
Betrays no spirit of repose;
The sullen warrior sole we trace,
The marble man of many woes.
Such was his mien when first arose
The thought of that strange tale divine,
When hell he peopled with his foes,
The scourge of many a guilty line.

War to the last he waged with all
The tyrant canker-worms of earth;

* It is told of DANTE that, when he was roaming over Italy, he came to a certain monastery, where he was met by one of the friars, who blessed him, and asked what was his desire; to which the weary stranger simply answered, "Pace."

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